

FIVE MINUTES WITH TOM MOOTY

(Column Number 2208)

"DANGLING A PREPOSITION"

During my illustrious career - you know, on my way to the top - I made a seven and one half year residence at Newport Grammar School. Mom and Dad, in conjunction with the President of the United States thought it was a "necessary evil", but what did they know?

They never asked me if I wanted to attend either here or at Dayton City School for the first one and one half years. I did not get a vote in this earth-shaking decision. I had no freedom of choice about spending these eight years of my life.

So, after moving from Dayton to Newport over the Christmas (can I say that word) holidays in 1948, I made the rigorous trek up the hill to good ole NGS. No, it was not five miles uphill both ways; it was, in fact, a short five block walk - a lot of fun, actually, as I have written previously.

The second grade was my first experience at Newport Grammar and Mrs. McGaha, where I met many lifelong friends. Then followed in rapid succession (although it seemed like an eternity at the time), Mrs. Horton, Miss Wilson, Mrs. Williams, Miss Thomas, Mrs. Butcher, and Mrs. Freeman.

Throughout this mind-boggling experience, I began to gain an appreciation for our English language. I did not know I would be a public speaker one day; nor did I know I would ever in my wildest dreams be a writer; and a preacher - well, nobody predicted that!

But, these ladies - and all their supporting cast - all combined their efforts to capture my mind and instill within me a sense of values - and then as a sidelight, as I used to say just to antagonize my sixth grade nemesis, Miss Elizabeth Thomas - they tried to "learn" me somethin'.

They drew their little illustrations and wrote their questions on the old black (later green) boards with dusty chalk; and I sat there and soaked it up.

They taught me about mathematics and health, civics and science, reading and spelling, geography (I even learned how to spell the word) and - have I mentioned - English Grammar (hence the name, Newport Grammar School). They put us through all sorts of mental calisthenics and role plays, written and oral tests, and "stand alones" and "get alongs".

I particularly remember (I do not know why particularly) a crude drawing of a house that several of them used. (Do you suppose there was a plan in play? Had they collaborated on this teaching scheme)?

Anyway, I digress - (like that word? I learned it in school).

The lesson was "the preposition"; a little word form that occupies a disproportionate amount of space in most sentences of our language.

They drew their little houses and then began to surround it with all the words that "pertain" to that little house: "of", "in", "to", "on", "into", "around", "beside", "under"; and on and on it went. They drew it; and I got it!

I got it! I learned prepositions; and I also learned that they should never be dangled; and how to diagram that sentence! Yet another lesson filed away on my way "to the top"!

But, I did not yet know how I would ever use this little bit of knowledge. Oh, it soaked in day-by-day; and every time I wrote a paper (or that now-famous term paper for Mrs. Babb in American History), I found that it all came in handy.

Then one day, Miss Elizabeth Thomas (with whom I served on the Executive Board of the Children's Bible Mission - remember the "Bible Ladies"?) called me. By the way, after I "grewed" up, Miss Thomas always referred to me as "Mr. Mooty".

Anyway, she called me; and began the conversation: "Mr. Mooty, do you know who you are speaking to". Now, wait a minute, how could you ever forget a voice like hers; so, yes, I knew "who I was speaking to"; but I could not help myself. I loved to pull her chain!

I answered, "Yes, this is someone who should know better than to dangle a preposition". She laughed and said, "Maybe you should give me the correct way to say it". She was pulling my chain now.

"Mr. Mooty; do you know to whom you are speaking?", I said; but I just had to add, "Even though I had not started speaking at the time, so technically the premise of "my speaking" was incorrect - from the 'git-go'." We laughed and went on with our business.

Thank God, and thank the teachers; I can read and study, write and speak - and my ministry as a minister is more complete because of that.

And I try to watch where I am dangling my prepositions at! As Frank Bell used to say, "I ain't never made but one gramacial error in my life; and I corrected that 'un as soon as I seen it".

Seriously, I just think we need to be the very best we can be - and I want to do the very best I can do for The Lord - Who gave His Very Best (Jesus Christ) for me - and you!

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